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## Beach Haven scuttles LBI plan to hire lobbyist

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Long Beach Island officials hit a snag in their plan to hire a lobbyist for federal funding for beach protection and maintenance Wednesday, when Beach Haven denied support for the plan.

A Wednesday morning meeting to finalize the agreement -supported by Long Beach Township, Barnegat Light, Surf City, Harvey Cedars and Ship Bottom - was canceled after Beach Haven withdrew.

"Apparently, Beach Haven pulled out," Long Beach Township Commissioner Robert Palmer said. "I don't know why; but that's their decision to make."

But Beach Haven Mayor Deborah Whitcraft said the town

didn't pull out because they never agreed to anything.

"We can't pull out of an agreement we don't even belong to," Whitcraft said. "This was merely a discussion among municipal officials."

Whitcraft's objection to the lobbyist plan is twofold: first, that congressmen should already be doing the job of a lobbyist; and second, that municipalities do not meet federal guidelines for funding - specifically, beach access every quarter-mile - in the first place.

"I thought we had a lobbyist in Congressman (James) Saxton and Ken Smith, our coastal advocate," Whitcraft said.

According to Palmer, however, Saxton and Smith could use all the help they can get.

"Getting funds from the feds is no easy task," Palmer said.

Federal funds would supply \$8 million to \$15 million to pump sand from the ocean onto the beach in an effort to expand the beach approximately 300 feet in the first two years, according to Palmer. The rest of the funding - \$53 million in all - would be directed at periodic replenishment of the beaches over the next 50 years.

The price of a lobbyist would be all the more extravagant, Whitcraft contended, if the island communities don't comply with federal requirements.

"Until the public-access issues are resolved according to the federal government, I don't see why we're going to apply for federal funds," said Whitcraft. "It seems to me that they're asking us to contribute to their legal fees when the federal government is perfectly within their rights to deny us these funds."

Palmer said the communities comply with access demands from the Army Corps of Engineers, but that the Department of Environmental Protection wants two more access points.

"We're currently in negotiations with the DEP about what they want," Palmer said.

He added that more possible access points have been located, but would not elaborate: "We're discussing the possibilities, and as soon as they're approved and the money is ready, we're ready to go."

Palmer said Long Beach Township will pay almost 67 percent of the lobbyist fees, and it and the other municipalities are prepared to pitch in some more, should Beach Haven stay out of the plan.

"I don't think there's a problem," Palmer said. "I think the rest of the island will band up on this."